



Advocacy Made Simple – **YOU are the Best Advocate for Your Zoo or Aquarium**

Introduction to Advocating for Zoos & Aquariums

A vital part of AZA's government affairs strategy is the continuing education of all Members of Congress as to the value of accredited zoos and aquariums, the vital role they play in conservation, education, recreation, tourism, job creation, and collectively as major contributors to the economy. Strengthening these relationships is vital to ensuring that zoos and aquariums will be viewed as trusted sources of conservation and environmental information.

What is government affairs?

AZA ensures that the interests of AZA member institutions are represented before Congress and the Federal agencies. These activities include:

- Monitoring relevant legislation and regulatory actions
- Developing policy position recommendations and strategies
- Seeking opportunities to provide testimony and comment
- Responding to Federal regulatory actions
- Participating in international treaties and conventions (CITES)
- Coordinating AZA Advocacy Days and Congressional Zoo and Aquarium Caucus activities
- Building coalitions and fostering partnerships with agencies and organizations in areas of mutual interest or concern

What issues does AZA care about?

AZA works on behalf of its members on a range of issues including:

- Animal Welfare Act
- Endangered Species Act
- Marine Mammal Protection Act
- Multinational Species Conservation Fund Acts and Reauthorizations
- Exotic animals as pets legislation
- Science education
- Federal funding opportunities

All I hear about is gridlock in Washington. Is anything actually getting done?

Legislative activity is not only defined by consideration and passage of bills...thousands of bills are introduced and hundreds of hearings are conducted in each Congress. These bills and hearings lay the groundwork for bills that may pass in future years. It can often be too late to achieve significant changes on these issues if stakeholders wait until the bill is ready for consideration by either the full House or Senate. Additionally, representatives and senators often will not cosponsor legislation or take action on an issue unless he or she hears from her constituents about its importance to them.

Regulations are proposed and implemented regardless of specific congressional action. Therefore, just because elected officials cannot reach compromise on some legislation, the executive branch agencies are likely taking an action this year that could affect you.

How do educating, advocating, and lobbying differ?

- Educating typically implies the communication of facts, data, reports, studies, program descriptions, budget information, population impacts, and other information without making a specific recommendation on a piece of pending legislation, appropriations or regulation. It has generally been accepted that educating federal and state decision makers is NOT lobbying and is a safe harbor of permissible activity under federal law.
- Advocacy is “education with an agenda.” It usually attempts to influence a decision or to encourage an action. It may be explicit (“please do X”) or implicit based on selective facts designed to lead to the desired conclusion, and it may be direct or indirect (grassroots).
- Lobbying generally is defined as the process of influencing public and government policy at all levels: federal, state, and local.

Examples of Education, Advocacy, and Lobbying:

- Education: Studies have proven that air pollution causes asthma and some forms of cancer.
- Advocacy: The U.S. should have cleaner air to reduce health impacts.
- Lobbying: Please vote for the Clean Air Act of 2012. Oppose the Smith amendment that would gut the enforcement standards. Provide an increase of \$10 million for the EPA clean air program.

How do I get started?

First, you should double-check what your institution’s restrictions are, if any, regarding advocacy and other government activities. Next, you should familiarize yourself with who your legislators and other government officials are, on what committees they may serve, and which issues are especially important to them. Most of this information is available to you at websites including:

- THOMAS (The Library of Congress): www.congress.gov
- House of Representatives: www.house.gov
- Senate: www.senate.gov
- White House: www.whitehouse.gov

You also should visit the AZA Legislative Education Center for more information about issues important to AZA and other helpful information

(<http://www.congressweb.com/cweb2/index.cfm/siteid/aza>).

How do I set up a meeting with my representative or senator?

Members of Congress' schedules fill rapidly, so plan your meeting well in advance. You don't need to travel to Washington, DC. You can meet at one of their local offices in their district or state.

Representatives and senators are usually in their districts during holidays and congressional recesses, and often on Mondays and Fridays. You can find the congressional schedule by looking at the House or Senate website at www.house.gov or www.senate.gov or by calling the Member of Congress' office. If his or her office offers a meeting with a staffer, take it. Congressional staffers are very influential.

Call the state or district office and ask for the scheduler or appointment secretary. You also should ask for the name and contact information of the policy advisor or legislative aide (LA) working on your issues. Explain your purpose and who you represent. Be clear about any sense of urgency (budget, appropriations, legislation coming up, etc.) It is easier for congressional staff to arrange a meeting if they know exactly what you wish to discuss, who you will be bringing with you, and why you think the Member of Congress will be interested.

Be sure to fax or email both the scheduler and the advisor or aide working on your issue, and don't forget to follow up a few days later. Members of Congress' offices process numerous requests a day, and staff may not notice if your request goes unanswered. After the meeting has been scheduled, forward any background materials to the Member of Congress' office with a cover letter restating the time and purpose of the meeting. Call the day before the meeting to confirm. This also will give you the opportunity to confirm who else will be in attendance. After the meeting, be sure to send a follow-up note thanking the Member of Congress/staff for their time and summarizing the salient points of the meeting.

Are there other ways to get to know my legislators besides scheduling a meeting?

You can get to know your legislators and their staff in a variety of ways including:

- Invite them to special events at your institution
- Offer to host events
- Send updates to their offices and staff
- Offer to be a resource to him or her in your specific field
- Offer a special visit

What else do I need to know?

- Have a story to tell
- Start where they are, not where you are
- Never assume you won't get support
- A compelling message is key
- Zoos and aquariums have bipartisan support
- Keep track of who has told you that they will (or will not) support your issue

- Don't forget that public perception matters
- Remember how the process works
- Don't give in too early
- Start now

What else can I do?

- Ask for your institution to be included on the “about my district/state” page of your congressional representatives’ websites
- Send a letter after elections congratulating elected officials
- Check to see if your representative and senators serve on the committees relevant to your issue
- Send letters of concern on your institution’s letterhead to the Chairman and Ranking Member of the committees overseeing your issue
- Submit comments during Federal rulemaking processes
- Build relationships: get to know legislative assistants and committee staff and keep in touch with your regulators and inspectors
- Position yourself as a resource to legislators and their staff
- Look for opportunities to engage with agencies on mutual areas of collaborations
- Inform your elected officials about the positive impact to the local community of projects funded by federal grants
- Alert AZA about any problems or concerns with an inspection or permit application
- Invite someone at the senior management level to work with you on engaging your representatives, and keep him or her apprised about the issues that are important to environmental education.
- Create an economic impact statement for your institution
(<http://www.aza.org/pressroom/detail.aspx?id=19490>)
- Consider participating in an advocacy day opportunity in Washington, DC (AZA’s is held each May!)

Keep it local. Keep it personal. Keep it concise.

Please direct questions to Jennifer Keaton (Vice President of Congressional Affairs) at jkeaton@aza.org or Steve Olson (Vice President of Federal Relations) at solson@aza.org